

Main Street Station (UNION STATION)
1520 East Main St.
Richmond
Virginia

HABS NO. VA-848
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ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

MAIN STREET STATION

(NEW) UNION STATION)

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Location: 1520 East Main Street (north side of Main Street between Main and East Franklin Streets), Richmond, Virginia

Present Owner and Occupant: Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad

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Present Use: Railroad Station

Statement of Significance: The Main Street Station, one of the few French Renaissance buildings in Richmond, exemplifies a standard train station plan of the late-nineteenth century. Designed by Wilson, Harris and Richards of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who also designed the Pennsylvania-Reading Station, the station was a very busy travel center of the city during the heyday of passenger service.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1901, with the first train using it 27 November of that year.
2. Architect: Wilson, Harris and Richards, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the land on which the structure was built.

1901 Seaboard Airline Railroad and the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad.

1959 Seaboard moved to another station and the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad became the sole owner.
4. Original plans and construction: Plan published in Richmond Times, 29 October 1899.
5. Alterations and additions: Minor interior alterations.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The station marked the cross-roads for the major north-south railroad, the Seaboard Airline Railroad, and the big east-west line, the Chesapeake and Ohio.

C. Sources of Information:

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1. Primary and unpublished sources: None.

2. Secondary and published sources:

"C & O Works at Richmond, Va.," Railway Age, 3 November 1899.

"A New Union Station at Richmond," Railway Age, 27 April 1900.

Richmond Times, 29 October 1899.

Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 May 1964, 5 December 1954.

Prepared by (Mrs.) Margaret T. Peters
Researcher
15 April 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Designed by Wilson, Harris and Richards, a Philadelphia architectural firm, the Main Street Station ranks as one of the major Virginia buildings in the Beaux-Arts tradition. Its general architectural style is early French Renaissance, but the reddish tile walls and roof, as well as the lavish use of terra cotta decoration, give the building a Germanic flavor. The long iron train shed at the rear of the building is a rare survival of early functional architecture. The total lack of architectural transition between the train shed and the main part of the building is an interesting example of the Victorian disregard for the integration of functional architecture with decorative historic styles.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: (Main block) 102 feet 5 inches by 63 feet. Seven bays wide on the entrance facade, three bays wide on the sides. Three and two one-half stories high.
2. Foundations: Rough-cut stone veneered over brick.
3. Wall construction: Brick veneered with an unbonded tile resembling Roman brick. Architectural decoration executed in stone and terra cotta.
4. Porches: A five-bay rough-hewn stone loggia with segmental arches frames the entrances in the center portion of the ground floor on the entrance facade. A central ell projecting from the rear of the terminal building acts as

the concourse or platform joining the terminal into the train shed. The platform is enclosed on the sides, but open to VA the shed on the north. 24. RICH 27.

5. Chimneys: An elaborate French Renaissance style chimney rises from between the first and second stories, between the first and second bays from the south. The base of the chimney is corbeled into the wall, and the shaft is anchored to the building by an ornamented tie-rod. An insignificant chimney rises from near the top of the north side to the roof.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The loggia on the ground floor of the facade contains an entrance to the building's main stairway in the first bay from the west. Other doorways in the loggia are also located in the third and fourth bays from the west. These doors feature sidelights, arched glass transoms and beveled glass panels in each of the double doors. The second and fifth bays from the west may also have contained doors, but they are closed at present. On the ground floor of the west side a doorway in the first bay from the north leads into the secondary stair well. Also located on the west front ground floor are loading docks for the main room beneath the concourse. On the first floor of the northern end of the building access from the main waiting room to the concourse was gained through a five-bay arcade echoing the arcade on the main front of the building. The first bay from the west contains the main staircase leading up from main street. Part of the remainder of the arcade has been obscured by a low modern ticket office. The remaining unaltered bays contain swinging glazed double doors. The upper portions of the arcade are glazed and repeat the tracery pattern of the south front windows.
- b. Windows: The principal windows of the ground floor are set in the rusticated base of the building and are crowned by segmental arches. On the first floor of the facade the two outside bays contain "French" windows, each of which opens onto a small balustraded balcony supported on consoles. Both of these windows are topped by projecting semi-circular decorative panels. The center five bays are in the form of an arcade with octagonal early French Renaissance type columns supporting the arches. The columns stand on pedestals with balusters between. The second floor of the building is in the form of a low gallery consisting of 13 bays on the entrance facade with two independent bays in the clock tower. The bays of the gallery are separated by engaged Corinthian columns supported on engaged pedestals. The gallery continues around all four sides of the building, but on the east and west sides the first-floor windows are single-arched windows richly ornamented with stone decoration.

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7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Very steep hipped roof covered with red tiles. Decorative bronze finials appear at each end of the ridge.
- b. Cornice: The building is surrounded by a relatively shallow entablature supported on the engaged columns between the second-floor windows. The entablature supports an elaborate balustrade composed of balusters alternating with scrolls and pedestals.
- c. Dormers and towers: On the roof are two levels of dormers. The first level consists of relatively plain dormers with steep hipped roofs alternating with quite elaborate dormers with pedimented tops. At the southwest corner of the building is a six-story clock tower. The top of the tower contains coupled engaged Corinthian columns which frame each face of the clock. The columns support an entablature on which rests a square dome crowned by an elaborate bronze finial.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Ground floor: The ground floor contains the service areas such as the baggage rooms, mail room, etc. The front portion of the ground floor immediately behind the loggia apparently was a public hall, but its plan has been altered.
 - b. First floor: The majority of the area of the first floor is occupied by the main waiting room. In the southeast corner of this level is the smaller ladies' waiting room. The eastern portion of this level contained ticket booths, but this portion of the floor has been partitioned off by a temporary walls, and the ticket office is now on the concourse. On the western side of the waiting room a large colonnaded screen with glazing set in arches between the columns separates the waiting room from the stairway to Main Street. The train shed on the north end of the building at the level of the first floor is approximately 486 feet long. It is made of wrought iron with cast-iron supports. Four tracks terminated at the station under the shed, while through tracks are located on either side.
 - c. Upper floors: The second, third and fourth floors are of little interest architecturally as they contain offices of merely functional design. Each level contains a center corridor running east and west with offices on either side.
2. Stairways: The principal stairway is located on the west side of the waiting room and ascends from the Main Street entrance

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to the first floor without turning, but with a landing in the center. The stair is enclosed on either side by tiled walls. The secondary staircase is located on the west side of the station and ascends to all floors in a nearly square stairwell with a scrolled iron balustrade.

3. Flooring: A variety of masonry flooring materials are found on the ground floor. The first floor is covered with various colored marbles, while the upper office floors are of hardwood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: On the ground floor the walls are covered with tiles. On the first floor the walls are plaster, as are the ceilings. The upper floors are the same.
5. Doorways and doors: Doors throughout the building are generally wood with glazed panels.
6. Decorative features and trim: In the public areas the decorative features include the screen of Corinthian columns in the waiting room and the coffered ceiling in both the waiting room and on the concourse. The very fine wrought-iron screen between the concourse and the shed area should also be noted.
7. Notable hardware: The full range of late-nineteenth century hardware can be found throughout the building.
8. Lighting: The building has always been entirely lit by electricity.
9. Heating: Radiators supplied with steam from the nearby power plant heat the building.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The station is located on the north side of lower Main Street in Shockoe Valley. Railroad tracks extend on either side of the building across bridges over Main Street. On the west side of the building is an elevated interstate highway which passes within seventy-five feet of the building at the level of the clock tower.
2. Outbuildings: A low power plant is located to the west of the building.

Prepared by Calder C. Loth
Architectural Historian
Virginia Historic
Landmarks Commission
15 April 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the Richmond Photo-Data Project, undertaken in

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1967 by HABS in cooperation with the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. During the period from July, 1967 to October, 1969, records were made of 11 historic structures in Richmond. The project primarily recorded examples of the cast-iron commercial architecture for which the city is known, though other building types are also included.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. James W. Moody, Jr., Executive Director, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, directed the operation in Richmond. Professor Paul Delaney of the University of Virginia School of Architecture assisted in the selection of subjects covered. Historical and architectural data were furnished by Messrs. Tucker Hill and Calder Loth, Architectural Historians of the Commission's staff. Photographer was Edward F. Heite, also on the staff of the Commission.

ADDENDUM
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Addendum to
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